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[563]

who work gold mines--and by the inhabitants of several regions, whose state of fortune would nevertheless enable them to use a more precious metal.

Jewelry and examples of the goldsmith's art are found in different forms and types which vary greatly with the region and race, as will be seen by the nomenclature given in Chapter IX.

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Food. The Laotian scorns the pleasures of the table, and is generally a moderate eater and drinker. Steam-cooked glutinous rice forms the basis of his food supply. To this he adds salt, peppers, various other spices, fresh or preserved fish, etc. Besides these, but less frequently, his day-to-day diet may be varied with poultry, eggs, buffalo meat, beef and pork, as well as venison. To be sure, it is mainly on the occasion of public or private festivals, which are fairly numerous in the course of the year, that the Laotian improves on his usual rather frugal fare in this way.

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The customary beverage is water which may be taken directly from the rivers or first be hastily decanted into jars or water-coolers of porous earthenware. In general, Laotians prefer water taken directly from the river to that which has been filtered. Finally, the people of Laos consume rice brandy which is obtained by distillation, and a kind of beer made by cold fermentation of rice mixed with paddy husks.

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The use of these drinks, aside from rare exceptions, is reserved for holidays.

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Physical appearance, character, occupations. The Laotian's character is, in general, mild, friendly and happy. His physiognomy is [181] open and smiling. Not quarrelsome by nature, he even shrinks from coming to blows in extreme cases and prefers to end a dispute with an outburst of laughter rather than with blows.

Since, all in all, it has few needs and inhabits a land with luxuriant vegetation which is abundantly favored with products to be had for the scavenging, this happy people can easily satisfy its needs and be content with its fate. [Illustration alongside text here.]

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It is assuredly lazy, but out of indifference much rather than out of any deliberate intent. It cannot grasp the advantage or utility of a regular and prolonged effort beyond what is strictly necessary to provide it with a living and a few distractions to which, in reality, its own joyous disposition makes the greatest contribution.

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To the men are reserved the chief tasks, which have a more virile and noble character than those which are the women's lot.

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